No New Leads Uncovered in

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The far-reaching, highly sensitive U.S. investigation of the recent bombing death here of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier has failed so far to score any significant breakthrough in solving the killing, according to informed sources

So sensitive is the probe that it already has prompted discussions involving US Attorney General Edward H. Levi and Central Intelligence Agency Director George Bush. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has also been informed of developments.

Letelier, 44, former ambassador to the United States, foreign minister and minister of defense in the Marxist government of the late Chilean President Salvador Allende, died Sept 21 when a bomb exploded beneath his car as he drove along Embassy Row here. One other passenger, Ronni K. Moffitt, also died. The bombing is under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The CIA is "cooperating" in the probe, at least to the extent of supplying intelligence data, according to government officials.

According to FBI and Justice Department sources, the FBI has not cracked the case, and there is no sign that investigators are on the verge of a breakthrough.

The probe—here and abroad—has produced no major suspects, these sources say. FBI attempts to determine the nature of the bomb that caused the explosion have remained inconclusive, the sources say.

The investigation of Letelier's death, moreover, has become partly intertwined with a separate investigation by Caribbean nations of the crash of a Cuban airliner off Barbados Oct. 6, in which 73 persons died. A group of Venezuelans and Cuban exiles has been held in Caracas on charges of blowing up the Cuban plane.

U.S. investigators in the probe of Letelier's killing are also checking leads among Cuban exile groups in the United States and Caribbean countries. Informed sources say, however, that the FBI had established no clear link between Cuban exiles and Letelier's murder.

CIA officials, nevertheless, say they believe that operatives of the present Chilean military junta did not take part in Letelier's killing, according to informed sources. CIA director Bush expressed this view in a conversation late last week with Secretary of State Kissinger, the sources said. What evidence the CIA has obtained to support this initial conclusion was not disclosed.

The CIA's reported belief that Chilean operatives did not kill Letelier appears singificant for two reasons. First, many critics of the current Chilean regime headed by Gen. Augusto Pinochet have sought to link the Chilean junta with Letelier's death—a charge vehemently denied by Chilean officials. Second, the role of the CIA in the Letelier investigation already is stirring a behind-the-scenes controversy.

The issue of CIA involvement in the probe was raised during an unusual meeting Oct. 21 at which Attorney General Levi and other Justice Department officials discussed the Letelier investigation with several of Letelier's American colleagues and his widow, Isabel.

According to several sources, the group expressed misgivings about the CIA's role in the investigation and urged Levi to use formal subpoenas to obtain information from the CIA. Levi, these sources said, rejected this proposal, saying that the CIA was cooperating with investigators and that such as move was not timely.

The meeting itself—drawing the attorney general directly into a murder investigation—appeared symptomatic of the U.S. government's intense concern over how the Letelier investigation is carried out.

Among those who talked with Levi, in addition to Mrs. Letelier, were Marcus G. Raskin, codirector of the Institute for Policy Studies, Saul Landau, an associate fellow of the institute, and Michael E. Tigar, a lawyer representing them. Among Justice Department officials present was Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene M. Propper, who is coordinating the Letelier investigation. Letelier had headed a foreign affairs research program at the Institute for Policy Studies before his death.

There has been at least one other high-level meeting at which the CIA's role in the Letelier probe was discussed. As The Washington Post previously reported, CIA director Bush met Oct. 4 with Assistant Attorney General J. Stanley Pottinger and Assistant U.S. Attorney Propper to confer over CIA participation in the investigation.

The CIA's role has raised sensitive legal and ethical questions, according to knowledgeable sources. The CIA, according to government disclosures last year, was involved in efforts to overthrow the Allende regime—the government in which Letelier had served.

In addition, the CIA has had ties to Cuban exiles and others who have now, according to informed sources, come under scrutiny in the Letelier investigation. These links raise the possibility, according to government officials, that an attempt to prosecute Letelier's assassins, if they are discovered, could endanger "national security" by disclosure of classified information.

The CIA also is restricted by its charter and other government regulations from engaging in some domestic activities. The official basis for its participation in the Letelier investigation has not been disclosed. Under "guidelines" for U. S. intelligence operations issued by President Ford last February, it appears possible that CIA involvement in the Letelier probe might be justified on a number of grounds.

In defense of the CIA, Justice Department officials say the intelligence agency is caught in an awkward position in the Letelier investigation. If it did not participate, it would risk criticism for concealing information. By participating, it opens itself to attack for allegedly manipulating the probe, these officials say.

At the time of his death, Letelier was the most prominent Chilean critic in the United States of the Pinochet regime. After Allende's overthrow Sept. 11, 1973, Letelier had been imprisoned in Chile for 364 days. He came to the United States soon after his release.

Letelier, Michael Moffitt and Moffitt's wife were on their way to the Institute for Policy Studies, a leftist "think tank" where all three worked, when Letelier's car was wrecked by a bomb that exploded as they crossed Sheridan Circle along Massachusetts Avenue NW. Michael Moffitt survived, without serious injury.

Although the federal investigation

Letelier Probe

of the bombing has achieved no major breakthroughs, FBI and Justice Department sources say the investigation is not stymied. Investigators, these sources say, are still pursuing many potentially fruitful leads and do not regard the murder as unsolvable.

FBI bomb experts are still investigating the nature of the explosive that killed Letelier and how it was detonated. According to sources close to the investigation, FBI bomb analysts have obtained a four-door Chevrolet Chevelle identical to the one driven by Letelier. The car is being dismantled and examined as a standard of comparison for studying the wreckage of Letelier's auto.

The explosive is now believed to have been a high-powered device, according to informed sources. It was designed to concentrate the main force of the blast upward toward the area beneath the driver's seat. Whether it was set off by a timing mechanism or by remote control has not been established, these sources say. Investigators found the face of a watch or clock near the site of the bombing, but are still uncertain whether this was part of the bomb, sources say.

In an interview last week, Chilean Ambassador Manuel Trucco reiterated his government's repudiation of the bombing and its denial of any link with Letelier's death. He said his embassy is cooperating with the FBI in the probe, although he has not formally waived diplomatic immunity.

Trucco noted that he himself was interviewed once by FBI agents, three days after Letelier's death. He said he was mainly asked general questions about Letelier and Chilean politics. He later telephoned the FBI with some information, Trucco said, but he declined to divulge what this was.

Three other Chilean officials in the United States have been interviewed by FBI agents, Trucco said. One of these is known to be the assistant Chilean naval attache, Commander Hernan Ferrer. Ferrer has not been linked with the bombing, according to sources close to the investigation. Trucco declined to identify the other two Chilean officials interviewed by the FBI.

When asked about possible links between Cuban exiles and Letelier's killing, Trucco said he had no information to substantiate such reports, many of which have come from Venezuela. Contradicting some reports from Caracas, Trucco said that the Chilean government has no direct ties with Cuban exiles opposed to the regime of Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro, although he expressed sympathy and respect for anti-Castro Cubans.

Trucco confirmed that Orlando Bosch, an anti-Castro Cuban exile leader wanted for questioning in the Letelier investigation, has visited Chile. But Trucco said Bosch apparently had been in Chile only once, more than a year ago. He said he had not yet confirmed other details about Bosch's visit.

Bosch heads an anti-Castro umbrella group known as the Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations. Bosch was imprisoned in 1968 on a 10-year sentence for firing a bazooka at a Polish ship docked in Miami, Fla., and telegraphing threats against other foreign-owned ships to the chiefs of state of Spain, Great Britain and Mexico. He was paroled in 1972. In 1974, a warrant was issued accusing him of a parole violation.

Bosch is now being held by Venezuelan authorities in connection with investigation of the Cuban airliner crash Oct. 6. According to sources close to the Letelier investigation, the U.S. government is seeking Bosch's return here, partly for questioning about Letelier's death, although he is not described as a suspect in the Letelier killing.

The United States passed up an earlier opportunity, in November, 1974, to obtain Bosch's return from Venezuela, according to Justice and State Department officials. Why the United States declined to seek Bosch's return two years ago is unclear. Officials interviewed last month said they could find no explanation for the decision.

After the arrest of Bosch and others in connection with the Cuban airliner crash, the Caracas newspaper El Nacional reported that Venezuelan authorities had uncovered wide-ranging terrorist plans by anti-Castro Cubans, including the killing of Letelier. Efforts by The Washington Post here and abroad to substantiate these reports have turned up no evidence to confirm them.